



Shakespeare's *Macbeth*- Plot Synopsis



Spoilers. Spoilers everywhere.

SHAKESPEARE'S ACT ONE

Scotland, ruled by King Duncan, is amidst a civil war. Three witches (the "Weird Sisters") gather in a brewing storm. Macbeth and Banquo, returning from battle as heroes, are confronted by the three Weird Sisters who prophesize that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and eventually King of Scotland. They also tell Banquo that while he will never be king, his sons *will* be. Suddenly, King Duncan sends word that he is promoting Macbeth to Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth secretly reasons that if one of the Weird Sisters' prophesies came true, the other might, too... King of Scotland. But how?

Macbeth and Banquo return to the camp, where Duncan announces that his eldest son, Malcolm, will inherit the throne. They will head back to Duncan's castle at Inverness but break the journey with a stay in Macbeth's castle to celebrate their victory. Macbeth announces he will ride ahead of them to get things prepared for their visit. He quietly agonizes that Prince Malcolm stands in the way of his becoming king.

Lady Macbeth receives a letter from her husband about his encounter with the witches. She immediately begins plotting a quicker way of achieving the throne but fears her husband won't be willing. Macbeth arrives home, and Lady Macbeth immediately plants the seeds of her murderous intentions.

Duncan and the Thanes arrive at Macbeth's castle. Macbeth tells his wife that he has decided against killing Duncan, and she is less than pleased. She explains her fool-proof plan for killing the king: she will drug the wine of the King's guards allowing Macbeth to attack Duncan while he sleeps. They will frame the guards for Duncan's murder by using their daggers. Macbeth is convinced and agrees to do it.

SHAKESPEARE'S ACT TWO

In the middle of the night, Banquo and son Fleance see that Macbeth is still awake. Banquo is suspicious of his friend's behavior, but he and Fleance go to bed. Now alone, Macbeth sees a vision of a bloody dagger. He hears a bell and goes to kill Duncan.

Lady Macbeth waits for Macbeth to return from the bloody deed. He comes back anxious and already riddled with guilt. Lady Macbeth sees that he has brought the guards' daggers with him rather than planting them at the scene. He refuses to go back, so Lady Macbeth goes instead.

Another Scottish thane, Macduff, arrives at the castle during the night. He discovers that King Duncan has been killed. King Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, believe that their own lives are in danger, so they flee the court; Malcolm to England and Donalbain to Ireland. Their decision to run away implies they killed their own father, making them the prime suspects. Macbeth is crowned king.

SHAKESPEARE'S ACT THREE

Macbeth, determined to stay in power and fearing the witches' divination that Banquo's children will be kings, hires assassins to kill Banquo and Fleance. Banquo is murdered that night, but Fleance escapes. Later, at a feast celebrating his coronation, Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost. His guilt is beginning to overwhelm him. Throughout Scotland, many begin to suspect Macbeth for the string of murders, and it is revealed that Macduff has gone to England to aid Malcolm as he prepares for war against Macbeth and Scotland.

SHAKESPEARE'S ACT FOUR

Fearing his crown (and his soul) are in jeopardy, Macbeth confronts the Weird Sisters who show him apparitions that give him three more prophecies: first, "Beware Macduff"; second, "none of woman born" shall harm him; and third, he shall never be defeated until Birnam Wood marches to his castle. Macbeth learns that Macduff has fled to England and sends murderers to kill his wife and children.

Meanwhile, in England, Macduff begs Malcolm to return to Scotland and seize the throne, and he agrees. Macduff learns of the murder of his family and vows revenge upon Macbeth.

SHAKESPEARE'S ACT FIVE

Back in Scotland, Lady Macbeth has gone mad with guilt. She sleepwalks every night, washing imagined blood from her hands and reliving the murder of Duncan. Malcolm and the English army arrive in Scotland and prepare to lay siege to the castle. They decide to cut down tree branches from Birnam Wood to disguise their approach.

Inside the castle, Macbeth begins to crack under the mounting pressure. As he calls for his armor, he learns that his wife has died. He then receives a message from the wall that it appears the forest is marching on the castle. Another prophecy has come true.

The battle begins, and Macbeth finally faces off against Macduff, admitting he has feared him the most of all men but boasting that he cannot be killed by any naturally born man. Macduff reveals that he was born via Caesarean section, and Macbeth resigns himself to death. Macduff slays Macbeth and hails Malcolm as the new King of Scotland.